



The Illinois Department of Corrections

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IDOC Celebrates North Park Theological Seminary's Inaugural Graduating Class from Stateville Correctional Center

Crest Hill, IL – Yesterday, Stateville Correctional Center hosted a graduation ceremony for 28 students who earned their Master of Arts degrees in Christian Ministry and Restorative Arts through an educational partnership with North Park Theological Seminary's School of Restorative Arts (SRA). The students were presented with diplomas during the ceremony inside Stateville's theater, attended by family and the next cohort of students. The commencement marks the first time a cohort has graduated with master's degrees inside an IDOC facility. Each student graduated the 54-hour degree program with high honors or honors.

David Kersten, Dean of the Seminary at North Park, presided over the graduation. Speakers at the ceremony included Warden Charles Truitt, Assistant Warden of Programs Kenneth Osborne, Education Facilities Administrator Laura Costabile of Stateville Correctional Center, Interim Dean of Faculty Dennis Edwards, Dean of Students and Community Life Debra Auger, and Mary Surridge, President of North Park University, and Cook County State Attorney Kim Foxx. Graduates Jamal Bakr, Manuel Metlock, and Rayon Sampson addressed their class with special music from graduates Lydia Vander Stelt and Brandon Lewis.



Graduate, Jamal Bakr

Photo: Karl Clifton-Soderstrom

Mission: To serve justice in Illinois and increase public safety by promoting positive change for those in custody, operating successful reentry programs, and reducing victimization.

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*Graduate, Manuel Metlock
Photo: Karl Clifton-Soderstrom*

Although North Park began offering classes at Stateville in 2015, this first cohort of students started their academic work towards the master's degree program in 2018. The four-year program is uniquely designed as an integrated classroom of both individuals in custody and outside individuals studying together. During the COVID-19 pandemic, North Park Theological Seminary and IDOC collaborated to keep the program running.

The MA program at Stateville has grown to 80 students and has recently expanded to Logan Correctional Center, where 20 students are currently enrolled. Students learn to prepare for ministries of restoration in contexts susceptible to violence with coursework in trauma, race relations, nonviolent communication, conflict transformation, restorative practices, and transformative justice, in addition to Bible, theology, and history. The program typically includes four 12-hour certificates, one per year, in Foundational Courses, Restorative Arts, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Arts.

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